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PTQ5895

RELEASED IN PART  
B1, 1.4(B), 1.4(D)

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ACTION WHA-01

INFO	LOG-00	ACQ-01	DODE-00	DOEE-00	SRPP-00	DS-00	H-01
	TEDE-00	INR-00	LAB-01	L-01	ADS-00	AC-01	NSAE-00
	OMB-01	OPIC-01	PA-00	PM-00	PRS-00	ACE-00	P-00
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R 011117Z JUL 99  
FM AMEMBASSY CARACAS  
TO SECSTATE WASHDC 4535  
INFO CIA WASHDC  
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NSC WASHDC  
USIA WASHDC 2488  
USCINCSO MIAMI FL  
AMEMBASSY BOGOTA  
AMEMBASSY QUITO  
AMEMBASSY LA PAZ  
AMEMBASSY BRASILIA  
AMEMBASSY MEXICO  
AMEMBASSY PORT OF SPAIN  
AMEMBASSY GEORGETOWN

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 CARACAS 002062

E.O. 12958: DECL: 06/30/09  
TAGS: PGOV, PREL, VE  
SUBJECT: RHETORIC RISES AS CAMPAIGN BEGINS  
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REF: A) CARACAS 1594; B) CARACAS 6/30 ASDAR

CLASSIFIED BY DCM NANCY MASON. REASONS 1.5 (B) AND (D).

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SUMMARY  
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1. (C) PRESIDENT HUGO CHAVEZ FRIAS AND THE NATIONAL ELECTORAL COUNCIL (CNE) HAVE BEEN ENGAGED IN A HIGHLY PUBLIC CONFRONTATION OVER WHETHER CHAVEZ (AND OTHER PUBLIC OFFICIALS) SHOULD BE ABLE TO OPENLY CAMPAIGN FOR CANDIDATES FOR THE UPCOMING JULY 25 NATIONAL CONSTITUTIONAL ASSEMBLY (ANC) ELECTION. ALTHOUGH CNE THREATENED TO

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF STATE  
REVIEW AUTHORITY: ALAN H FLANIGAN  
CLASSIFICATION: CONFIDENTIAL REASON: 1.4(B), 1.4(D)  
DECLASSIFY AFTER: 30 JUN 2014  
DATE/CASE ID: 10 JUL 2007 200504156

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REPRIMAND AND FINE CHAVEZ, HE VOWED TO OPENLY CAMPAIGN FOR, AND MAKE THE PUBLIC AWARE OF, HIS CANDIDATES. CNE ALSO WARNED THAT IT WOULD POSTPONE THE ANC ELECTIONS IF THE INTEGRITY OF THE ELECTORAL PROCESS IS COMPROMISED. CHAVEZ SAID THAT SUCH AN ACTION BY THE CNE WOULD AMOUNT TO "A COUP D'ETAT AGAINST THE PEOPLE." IN KEEPING WITH THE COUP THEME, CHAVEZ ON JUNE 26 DECLARED THAT HE COULD "DO WHAT FUJIMORI DID IN 1992," BUT THAT HE DID NOT WANT TO DO THIS BECAUSE "THE COUNTRY'S DIRECTION DEPENDS ON THE COLLECTIVE." INTERIOR MINISTER ARCAYA AND FORMER INTERIOR MINISTER MIQUILENA CATEGORICALLY DENIED THAT CHAVEZ HAD THREATENED A COUP. TWO DAYS LATER, CHAVEZ HIMSELF SAID HIS WORDS WERE MISINTERPRETED, ADDING THAT HE HAD NO INTENTION TO DISSOLVE CONGRESS. CHAVEZ ALSO INTRODUCED HIS "2-KEY" STRATEGY TO ENSURE THAT ALL 20 OF POLO PATRIOTICO'S NATIONAL CANDIDATES ARE ELECTED. HE ANNOUNCED THAT HIS GOAL WAS TO WIN (THROUGH HIS POLO PATRIOTICO CANDIDATES) 100 OF THE 131 ANC SEATS. WHILE THE PUBLIC RHETORIC IS CURRENTLY IN RESPITE, WE EXPECT THE VOLUME TO INCREASE AS THE CAMPAIGN PROCEEDS.

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END SUMMARY.

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CHAVEZ VS. THE CNE IN A GAME OF CHICKEN  
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2. (U) PRESIDENT CHAVEZ MADE IT CLEAR THAT HE INTENDED TO OPENLY SUPPORT HIS POLITICAL ALLIES DURING THE ANC ELECTION CAMPAIGN, DESPITE THE NATIONAL ELECTORAL COUNCIL'S (CNE) ANNOUNCEMENT THAT CHAVEZ--OR ANY OTHER PUBLIC OFFICIAL--WOULD BE REPRIMANDED AND FINED FOR ACTIVELY ENGAGING IN POLITICAL CAMPAIGN ACTIVITY. THE CNE RULED ON MAY 19, BASED ON ARTICLES 210 AND 215 OF THE ORGANIC LAW ON SUFFRAGE AND POLITICAL PARTICIPATION, THAT HIGH PUBLIC OFFICIALS, INCLUDING THE PRESIDENT, COULD NOT CAMPAIGN FOR OR AGAINST NATIONAL CONSTITUTIONAL ASSEMBLY (ANC) CANDIDATES (REF A). CHAVEZ ARGUED THAT THE CURRENT SUFFRAGE LAWS DID NOT APPLY TO ELECTIONS OTHER THAN PRESIDENTIAL ONES. HE FURTHER JUSTIFIED HIS POSITION, POINTING OUT THAT LAST YEAR MOST STATE GOVERNORS JOINED THE PRESIDENTIAL CAMPAIGN WHILE IN OFFICE.

3. (U) ON JUNE 24, THE CNE ISSUED AN OFFICIAL COMMUNIQUE WARNING CIVIL SERVANTS, INCLUDING THE HEAD OF STATE, AGAINST BEING INVOLVED IN ANY KIND OF POLITICAL CAMPAIGNING. CNE PRESIDENT ANDRES CALECA PUBLICLY ANNOUNCED THAT THE CNE WOULD APPLY THE LEGAL MECHANISMS AND WOULD HAVE TO FINE THE PRESIDENT IF CHAVEZ BROKE ELECTORAL RULES. ACCORDING TO THE SUFFRAGE LAW, CHAVEZ, OR ANY OTHER PUBLIC OFFICIAL WHO DEFIES THE REGULATION, COULD BE FINED UP TO 384,000 BOLIVARES.

4. (U) CHAVEZ RESPONDED TO THE WARNING, "MY CHECKBOOK IS READY."

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PLACING THE CNE ON THE SAME LEVEL WITH THE CONGRESS AND THE SUPREME  
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COURT, CHAVEZ CHALLENGED THE CNE TO FINE HIM, "I HAVE BEEN  
REPRIMANDED BY EVERYONE. LET THEM CONTINUE TO REPRIMAND ME,  
BECAUSE I NO LONGER CARE. CONGRESS REPRIMANDED ME A FEW MONTHS  
AGO; THE SUPREME COURT OF JUSTICE ALSO REPRIMANDED ME; AND NOW THE  
NATIONAL ELECTORAL COUNCIL REPRIMANDED ME. I WELCOME THOSE  
REPRIMANDS, AS LONG AS THEY ARE GIVEN AS I FULFILL MY DUTY."

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STEPPING ON THE ACCELERATOR: "AUTO-GOLPES" AND "GOLPES"  
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5. (C) CHAVEZ STEPPED ON THE ACCELERATOR IN THIS POLITICAL GAME OF  
CHICKEN WHEN HE DECLARED ON JUNE 26 THAT HE COULD STAGE AN "AUTO-  
GOLPE" A LA FUJIMORI, "I COULD DO WHAT FUJIMORI DID IN PERU IN  
1992. I COULD DO IT RIGHT NOW, AT 11:00 AM ON JUNE 26 OR TONIGHT.  
WHATEVER DAY I WANT TO DO IT AND IT WOULD DEPEND ON MY DECISION  
EXCLUSIVELY. I WOULD ASSUME MY RESPONSIBILITY BEFORE THE ENTIRE  
WORLD, BUT I DON'T THINK I WANT TO DO THIS. THE DECISION IS NOT  
MINE, BUT RATHER, THE DECISION ABOUT WHERE WE ARE GOING DEPENDS ON  
THE COLLECTIVE, AND I AM MERELY A CATALYST OF THE PROCESS."

6. (C) IMMEDIATELY FOLLOWING CHAVEZ'S "COUP" REMARK ON JUNE 26,

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R 011117Z JUL 99  
FM AMEMBASSY CARACAS  
TO SECSTATE WASHDC 4536  
INFO CIA WASHDC  
DIA WASHDC  
NSC WASHDC  
USIA WASHDC 2489  
USCINCSO MIAMI FL  
AMEMBASSY BOGOTA  
AMEMBASSY QUITO

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AMEMBASSY LA PAZ  
AMEMBASSY BRASILIA  
AMEMBASSY MEXICO  
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AMEMBASSY GEORGETOWN

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 02 OF 03 CARACAS 002062

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CNE PRESIDENT ANDRES CALECA MET THE PRESIDENT'S CHALLENGE, WARNING THAT IF THE INTEGRITY OF THE ELECTORAL PROCESS WERE VIOLATED, THE CNE WOULD BE OBLIGED TO DEFER THE ANC ELECTIONS TO A LATER DATE. PRESIDENT CHAVEZ RESPONDED SWIFTLY THAT SUCH AN ACTION BY THE CNE WOULD QUALIFY AS "A COUP D'ETAT AGAINST THE PEOPLE," WHICH WOULD "GENERATE A TERRIBLE CRISIS IN VENEZUELA THAT WOULD PLACE PUBLIC PEACE AND INSTITUTIONAL STABILITY IN DANGER." CHAVEZ MAINTAINED THAT THE CNE DID NOT HAVE THE AUTHORITY TO POSTPONE THE ELECTIONS. CNE INSISTED IT HAD THE EXCLUSIVE AUTHORITY TO DETERMINE THE ELECTORAL TIMETABLE.

7. (U) CHAVEZ ALSO ADMONISHED THE CNE FOR NOT YET HAVING RELEASED THE LIST OF NATIONAL AND REGIONAL CANDIDATES, THE SAMPLE BALLOT, OR THE OFFICIAL GAZETTE WITH THE SHORT BIOGRAPHIES ON THE CANDIDATES. THE CNE IGNORED THESE ACCUSATIONS, STATING ONLY THAT THEY ARE ON SCHEDULE.

8. (U) THE FOLLOWING DAY, JUNE 28, INTERIOR MINISTER IGNACIO ARCAJA CATEGORICALLY DENIED REPORTS THAT CHAVEZ HAD THREATENED TO STAGE A COUP IF THE CNE WERE TO POSTPONE THE ANC ELECTION (REF B). "THE PRESIDENT HAS NOT THREATENED A COUP," RATHER HE TALKED ABOUT A HYPOTHETICAL DELAY IN THE ELECTION, AND THAT THERE COULD BE OTHER SOLUTIONS, SAID ARCAJA. FORMER INTERIOR MINISTER MIQUILENA PUBLICLY DENIED CHAVEZ HAD THREATENED A COUP. CHAVEZ, HIMSELF, RETREATED FROM HIS SPECULATIONS OF A COUP IN RIO DE JANEIRO FOLLOWING THE LATIN AMERICAN-CARIBBEAN-EU SUMMIT, ACCORDING TO LOCAL PRESS REPORTS. CHAVEZ CALLED THE LOCAL RIO PRESS TOGETHER ON JUNE 28 TO SAY THAT HIS WORDS ABOUT A "COUP" WERE MISINTERPRETED, AND ADDED THAT HE WOULD NOT DISSOLVE THE VENEZUELAN CONGRESS.

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CHAVEZ'S ANC STRATEGY

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9. (U) PRESIDENT CHAVEZ ANNOUNCED AT A POLO PATRIOTICO EVENT ON JUNE 27 THE POLITICAL STRATEGY FOR "WINNING THE JULY 25 BATTLE." FOR THE FIRST TIME, HE PUBLICLY ADMITTED THAT THE ABSTENTION RATE FOR THE APRIL 25 ANC REFERENDUM WAS TOO HIGH AND ASKED THAT AT LEAST 80 PERCENT OF THE ELECTORATE VOTE ON JULY 25. "WE HAVE TO WIN AN OVERWHELMING MAJORITY IN THE ANC ELECTIONS," SAID CHAVEZ. THE GOAL, HE SAID, WAS TO ELECT POLO PATRIOTICO CANDIDATES TO 100 OF THE 131 ANC SEATS.

10. (U) OF 131 SEATS IN THE ANC, 24 ARE TO BE ELECTED AT THE NATIONAL LEVEL. EACH VOTER CAN CHOOSE 10 NATIONAL CANDIDATES. POLO PATRIOTICO HAS PUT FORWARD 20 NATIONAL CANDIDATES. TO ENSURE THAT ALL 20 OF THE POLO PATRIOTICO'S NATIONAL CANDIDATES ARE ELECTED, CHAVEZ INTRODUCED WHAT HE CALLED HIS "2-KEY" STRATEGY. THE "FIRST KEY" WILL BE A LIST OF 10 OF POLO PATRIOTICO'S 20 NATIONAL CANDIDATES, FOR WHOM THE VOTERS FROM THE FEDERAL DISTRICT AND THE STATES OF MIRANDA AND VARGAS WILL BE INVITED TO VOTE. THE "SECOND KEY" WILL BE A LIST OF THE OTHER 10 POLO PATRIOTICO NATIONAL CANDIDATES, FOR WHOM THE REST OF THE COUNTRY WOULD VOTE.

11. (U) AT A JUNE 22 PRESS CONFERENCE, PRESIDENT CHAVEZ LISTED 10 GUIDELINES FOR THE NEW MAGNA CARTA AND INSTALLED A PRESIDENTIAL CONSTITUTIONAL COUNCIL THAT WILL GATHER IDEAS FROM DIFFERENT SOCIAL SECTORS TO DRAW UP A LIST OF PROPOSALS FOR THE SOON-TO-BE-ELECTED ANC. THE MEMBERS OF THE COUNCIL INCLUDE: LABOR MINISTER LINO MARTINEZ, FORMER DEPUTY TAREK WILLIAM SAAB, LUIS VALLENILLA, RICARDO COMBELLAS, ESPINAL VASQUEZ, FORMER SENATOR HERNAN ESCARRA,  
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RETIRED MAJOR GENERAL LUIS ESPINAL, AND ATTORNEY GENERAL JAVIER ELECHIGUERRA. CHAVEZ'S 10 GUIDELINES FOR THE NEW CONSTITUTION ARE: (1) RESPECT FOR THE DEMOCRATIC SYSTEM; (2) THE CREATION OF BROAD POLITICAL SYSTEM BASED ON ETHICS; (3) A "TRUE FEDERALISM" ACHIEVED THOROUGH A PROCESS OF DECENTRALIZATION; (4) A JUDICIARY POWER THAT IS HONEST AND INDEPENDENT, (5) STRONG DEFENSE OF HUMAN RIGHTS, BOTH INDIVIDUAL AND COLLECTIVE; (6) A NEW ECONOMIC ORDER, (7) A NEW SOCIAL ORDER; (8) WIDER PROTECTION FOR CITIZENS; (9) A NEW STRATEGY FOR NATIONAL SECURITY AND DEFENSE; AND (10) THE ESTABLISHMENT OF "MORAL POWER" AS A MECHANISM TO MODERNIZE AND CLEANSE THE STATE.

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COMMENT  
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12. (C) [REDACTED] CONFIRMED THAT PRESIDENT CHAVEZ HAS NOT YET BROKEN ANY LAWS SINCE CAMPAIGNING OFFICIALLY BEGAN ONLY ON JUNE 24. INSTEAD, CHAVEZ HAS KEPT THE

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RHETORIC HIGH, COMPLYING TO THE LETTER--IF NOT THE SPIRIT--OF THE LAW. ANALYSTS SPECULATE THAT CHAVEZ IS TRYING TO MOBILIZE THE ELECTORATE WITH HIS COMBATIVE RHETORIC BECAUSE HE FEARS A LOW VOTER TURNOUT. HE ALSO PROBABLY FEELS A DEGREE OF PRESSURE TO OBTAIN AN

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	SP-00	IRM-01	TRSE-00	PMB-00	DSCC-00	DRL-02	G-00
	FDIC-01	NFAT-00	SAS-00	/012W			

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R 011117Z JUL 99  
FM AMEMBASSY CARACAS  
TO SECSTATE WASHDC 4537  
INFO CIA WASHDC  
DIA WASHDC  
NSC WASHDC  
USIA WASHDC 2490  
USCINCSO MIAMI FL  
AMEMBASSY BOGOTA  
AMEMBASSY QUITO  
AMEMBASSY LA PAZ  
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OVERWHELMING MAJORITY IN THE ANC, RATHER THAN MERELY PREVAIL.

13. (C) AFTER SUCCESSFULLY PULLING OFF THE NOVEMBER REGIONAL ELECTIONS, THE DECEMBER PRESIDENTIAL ELECTIONS, THE MARCH RE-ELECTIONS IN THE STATE OF NUEVA ESPARTA, AND THE APRIL REFERENDUM, THE CNE ENJOYS A HIGH LEVEL OF RESPECT FROM ALL VENEZUELAN. IRONICALLY, CHAVEZ' PUBLIC CONFRONTATION WITH THE CNE HAS ELEVATED

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ITS STATUS IN THE EYES OF THE PUBLIC. SHOULD CHAVEZ DECIDE TO CROSS OVER THE FINE LINE LAID DOWN BY THE ELECTORAL REGULATIONS, HE WILL HAVE TO TAKE INTO ACCOUNT THE DETERMINATION OF THE CNE'S BOARD AND THE RESPECT THAT THE NATIONAL ELECTORAL COUNCIL ENJOYS. CNE IS STARTING TO SWEAT A BIT FROM THE STANDOFF WITH CHAVEZ, BUT THEY ARE HOLDING STEADY.

14. (C)

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CHAVEZ HAS NOT PUBLICLY CONFRONTED THE CNE SINCE THE EXCHANGE REACHED A CRESCENDO ON JULY 27, AND MAY HAVE CONCLUDED THAT PUBLICLY CONFRONTING THE CNE IS NOT THE BEST STRATEGY. NEVERTHELESS, TIMING AND CIRCUMSTANCES SUGGEST PUBLIC OFFICIALS'--AND SPECIFICALLY CHAVEZ'S--POLITICAL ACTIVITY WILL REEMERGE AS AN ISSUE SOONER RATHER THAN LATER.

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